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IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE WESTERN DISTRICT OF VIRGINIA
ROANOKE DIVISION

MICHAEL SHAWN BENTON,) Civil Action No. 7:10 -cv-00458
Petitioner,)
v.) MEMORANDUM OPINION
COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA,) By: Hon. Jackson L. Kiser
Respondent.) Senior United States District Judge

Michael Shawn Benton, a Virginia inmate proceeding pro se, brings this action as a petition for writ of habeas corpus, pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 2254. Petitioner challenges the validity of his confinement under the 1997 judgment of the Circuit Court for the City of Roanoke, convicting him of first-degree murder and use of a firearm in the commission of murder. Upon consideration of the petition, it will be dismissed summarily pursuant to Rule 4 of the Rules Governing § 2254 Cases. A petition may be dismissed under this rule if it is clear from the petition that the petitioner is not entitled to relief.

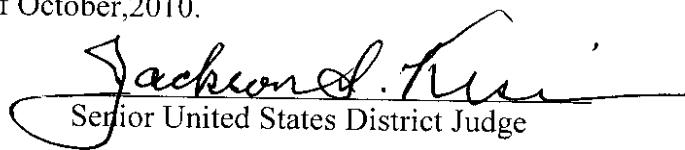
Under 28 U.S.C. § 2254(b), a federal court cannot grant a habeas petition unless the petitioner has exhausted the remedies available in the courts of the state in which he was convicted. Preiser v. Rodriguez, 411 U.S. 475 (1973). If the petitioner has failed to exhaust state court remedies, the federal court must dismiss the petition. Slayton v. Smith, 404 U.S. 53 (1971). The exhaustion requirement is satisfied by seeking review of the claim in the highest state court with jurisdiction to consider the claim. See O'Sullivan v. Boerckel, 526 U.S. 838 (1999). In Virginia, a non-death row felon can exhaust the state remedies in one of three ways, depending on the nature of the claims raised. First, the inmate can file a direct appeal to the Virginia Court of Appeals, with a subsequent appeal to the Supreme Court of Virginia if the Court of Appeals rules against him/her. Second, the inmate can attack the conviction collaterally

by filing a state habeas petition with the circuit court where the inmate was convicted, with an appeal of an adverse decision to the Supreme Court of Virginia. See Va. Code §§ 8.01-654(A)(1); 17.1-411. Finally, the inmate can exhaust the remedies by filing a state habeas petition directly with the Supreme Court of Virginia. Id. Whichever route the inmate chooses to follow, it is clear that the inmate ultimately must present his/her claims to the Supreme Court of Virginia and receive a ruling from that court before a federal district court can consider them. A petitioner can not have exhausted state remedies if a petitioner has the right under the law of the state to raise, by any available procedure, the question presented. 28 U.S.C. § 2254(c).

In this case, the petition clearly shows that petitioner has not presented the claims to the Supreme Court of Virginia as required.¹ Petitioner's failure to exhaust the state remedies mandates summary dismissal of the petition by this court.² Based upon the finding that the petitioner has not made the requisite substantial showing of denial of a constitutional right as required by 28 U.S.C. § 2253(c)(1), a certificate of appealability is denied.

The Clerk of the Court is directed to send certified copies of this memorandum opinion and final order to petitioner.

ENTER: This 15th day of October, 2010.



Senior United States District Judge

¹ In the petition, petitioner acknowledges that he has not yet filed a petition for a writ of habeas corpus in state court.

² Petitioner may refile his federal habeas petition if he is still unsuccessful in obtaining relief after presenting his claims to the Supreme Court of Virginia through one of the three routes described. Petitioner is advised, however, that his time to file state or federal habeas petitions is now limited. See 28 U.S.C. §2244(d); Virginia Code §8.01-654(A)(2).